

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

February 28, 2019

The Honorable Andrew Wheeler
Administrator
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20460

Dear Administrator Wheeler:

Thousands of Mississippi residents are yet again experiencing severe flooding, and National Weather Service forecasts indicate the problem will be much worse in the coming weeks. We write to bring this urgent matter to your attention, and to request swift action by your agency to prevent devastating flooding in the future.

On August 31, 2008, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) issued a veto pursuant to Section 404(c) of the Clean Water Act preventing construction of the Yazoo Backwater Area Pump Project, a federally-authorized U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Civil Works project designed to reduce flooding in a 630,000-acre area in west-central Mississippi. As result of EPA action, the area has suffered more than \$377 million in damages from nine separate flood events between 2008 and 2018. We understand that revisiting the veto has been raised by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and trust that your agency is reviewing this matter carefully. We believe continued flood impacts, combined with updated information about the wetland habitats, warrant withdrawal of the EPA veto.

The alluvial lands of the Yazoo Backwater Project Area have historically been subject to Mississippi River flooding. The primary purpose of this project, which has been authorized and funded by Congress, is to reduce flooding on the protected side of the Mississippi and Yazoo River levees. During periods of high water, floodgates at two structures in the levee system are closed, necessitating removal of water trapped in the interior following excessive rains. Without a pumping station, these interior floods will continue to affect public roads, bridges, homes, schools, churches, and thousands of acres of agricultural and timberland.

Nearly 400,000 acres are already inundated with water, displacing residents, destroying homes, blocking roads, and preventing farmers from preparing for the new crop season. Should forecasts hold true, roughly 500,000 acres in the south Mississippi Delta will be under water by March 21. Unfortunately, this is a reoccurring problem, but this problem can be prevented by allowing the Corps of Engineers to move forward with its recommended flood control plan.

We respectfully request that you visit the Yazoo Backwater Area during the week of March 18 to observe this problem first-hand. Thank you for taking this important matter into consideration.

Sincerely,


CINDY HYDE-SMITH
United States Senator


ROGER WICKER
United States Senator